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ABSTRACT

The character of art criticism, both how it naturally occurs and how it is academically constructed, is reflective of social and aesthetic value orientations--much as the art object itself has been found to be a clue to the values of the society in which it is practiced, used, and appreciated. The belief that the art object possesses characteristics and meanings separate from its sociocultural context, and separate from how it has been interpreted in various times and spaces, has resulted in assumptions of universalism that have served to legitimize certain types of art and to denigrate others. There is a danger that art criticism could become a specific procedure of analysis by which it is believed a pansocial meaning and evaluation of art can be achieved. Future planning for art criticism instruction should attend to three things: (1) a variety of academic art criticism formats should be developed and instructionally implemented according to the needs, abilities, and interests of teachers and students; (2) vernacular, naturally occurring art criticism needs to be allowed expression within the classroom setting; and (3) the act of art criticism itself, its origins and the use of particular types, should be examined for its taken-for-granted assumptions and for its ability to illuminate some aspects of art and to obscure others. Art criticism, no less than other aspects of art instruction, presents occasions for elaborated artistic understanding as well as a critical consciousness of the origins, range, and possible consequences of instructional choices. A list of 41 references is included. (Author/PPB)

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# Beyond Universalism in Art Criticism

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Abstract

The character of art criticism, both how it naturally occurs and how it is academically constructed, is reflective of social and aesthetic value orientations--much as the art object itself has been found to be a clue to the values of the society in which it is produced, used, and appreciated. The belief that the art object possesses characteristics and meanings separate from its sociocultural context, and separate from how it has been interpreted in various times and spaces, has resulted in assumptions of universalism that have served to legitimate certain types of art and to denigrate other types. There is a danger that art criticism could, likewise, become a more-or-less specific procedure of analysis by which it is believed a pansocial meaning and evaluation of art can be achieved. The purpose of this paper is to examine claims for universalism in art and in art criticism, how art criticism could be studied and organized to avoid such claims, and how talk about art can be studied and engaged in for purposes of critical consciousness.

# Beyond Universalism in Art Criticism

Until fairly recently, studies of artistic meaning have tended to focus on the characteristics of the object of art or, perhaps, the psychology and career of the artist. There has been a lesser concern with the characteristics of the appreciators of art and their statements of response. This focus is subtly changing with the post-modern interest on the contexts of human actions and the variable meanings given to phenomena. In art, this change is reflected in developmental studies of aesthetic response, in field research on the types of actions and statements that so-called "surround" the physical entity of the art object, and in proposals that art instruction include art criticism. It would appear that the semiotic triad of object-actor-meaning is beginning to take shape, and in this paper the focus will be on how that could be manifested in the implementation of art criticism instruction.

Art criticism has been defined as more or less organized talk about art (Feldman, 1973). Unlike aesthetics, in which the focus is on the nature of art and an examination of why we respond to art as we do, art criticism is talk about art that examines a specific object's meaning and value (Sharer, 1986). Such talk can spontaneously occur, or it can be part of a particularized pedagogical practice. In this paper, the former will be referred to as vernacular art criticism and the latter as academic art criticism.

Our long history of focusing primarily on the object of art in regard to its stylistic characteristics, formal qualities, and aesthetic values can serve us well as we embark on the study and implementation of

art criticism in educational settings. It is hoped that an awareness of this history could spare art criticism study some of the more blatant oversights that have occurred in the search for concrete physical characteristics of the art object that might have universal implications. Basing artistic judgments of value on formal, aesthetic qualities and on the extent to which the object can be classified as "fine art" are but two areas in which much art study has obscured variable meanings and values of art. These have also obscured the differential, class-based manner in which artistic designations are made and in which aesthetic knowledge is distributed in Western societies (Bersson, 1987).

If the shortcomings of the past are not heeded, art criticism could easily succumb to claims of universalism and to a lack of attention to vernacular forms of art criticism. History could repeat itself. For example, it has often been believed that art objects possess immutable characteristics that communicate across time and space. Likewise, art criticism could become a more-or-less specific procedure of analysis by which it is believed a pansocial meaning and evaluation of art can be achieved. This danger is especially acute at this time when major educators and scholars are claiming that there is a common fund of knowledge that needs to be learned if we are to be culturally literate (Hirsch, 1987), that there is a common culture in the United States, that there should be a common language, and that we should all have access to our [sic] common aesthetic heritage (Bennett, 1987/1988).

Moreover, major philanthropic and professional institutions of art are proposing that art study and monetary support be limited to artistic exemplars that have been so designated by experts in the mainstream art world (Bersson, 1987; The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1985).

The purpose of this paper is to examine claims for universalism in art and in art criticism, how art criticism could be studied and organized to avoid such claims, and how talk about art can be studied and engaged in for purposes of critical consciousness. It will be proposed that the character of art criticism, both how it naturally occurs and how it is academically constructed, is reflective of social and aesthetic value orientations--much as the art object itself has been found to be a clue to the values of the society in which it is produced, used, and appreciated.

Although the art object is certainly the impetus for art criticism, the focus in this paper is on the character of art criticism as an entity in its own right and on art criticism study as having implications for critical consciousness. The belief that the art object possesses characteristics and meanings separate from its sociocultural context, and separate from how it has been interpreted in various times and spaces, has resulted in assumptions of universalism that have served to legitimate certain types of art and to denigrate other types. Emphasis on the singularity of the art object and its perceptual qualities has also resulted in an isolated, bracketed response to art as an aesthetic goal and talk about the formal qualities of art as an art criticism standard. To examine the sources and character of

universalism in art and to explore alternatives for art criticism, the following will be discussed in this paper: (1) art criticism as a process of selection and valuation, (2) fallacies and consequences of assumptions of universalism, (3) the educational implications of vernacular and academic modes of art critical discussion, (4) the distribution of aesthetic discourse, and (5) art criticism for critical consciousness.

## Art Criticism Origins

Although talk about the merits of art and of specific objects has a lengthy history in academic and literary settings and an even longer history as informal discussions among the makers and appreciators of art, both aesthetics and art criticism as specific, formalized areas of study are relatively recent activities in most Western cultures. In the eighteenth century, Baumgarten coined the term "aesthetics," and associated its philosophical origins and psychological perception with the nature of beauty (Osborne, 1970, 1972). Art criticism has a less precise academic genesis, with much art critical discussion falling under the general category of art appreciation. Formalized analyses of specific works of art became particularly important during the last century. Academy-supported works, which often dealt with mythic subject matter and esoteric story lines, required explanation. As dissident groups of artists in Europe broke with Academy traditions, their works also required interpretation and evaluation for a confused, if not embittered, public.

> He who depends, as his grandfather might have done, on the normal processes of his social environment to introduce him to the paintings and sculptures that form part of his culture will end with neither art nor knowledge.
>
> This is another way of saying that art has become part of "language"; it is a writing of sorts; and there is a growing difficulty in detaching the work from meanings of a literary and theoretical order. (Rosenberg, 1966, p. 198)

The point needs to be made that art criticism does not need to be a conscious, analytical probing of meaning and the formulation of a concise evaluation. It can be a verbalization of meanings and valuations that are already possessed. Meaning may or may not change during the interactive process of making meaning public and sharing it with others. An analytical probing of meaning and value is most characteristic of formalized, academic art criticism and of art criticism dealing with unfamiliar art forms. Not surprisingly, art criticism as a formalized activity and as an art career option owes much to the inception of abstract and nonobjective art in the twentieth century, to our access to a wealth of cross-cultural and historic arts, and to the rapid proliferation of art styles during this century. Art critics in vernacular and academic settings arbitrate meaning, significance, and value. With familiar art forms, art critics stabilize meaning or provide new insights. With the unfamiliar, they explain and evaluate.

Art criticism in America's schools has traditionally been more a

form of generalized art appreciation or even art historical study than of art criticism per se. Visual qualities, the biography of the artist, stylistic designation, media considerations, and so on have been discussed or even presented by the teacher as information for students to learn. Such was the case with the Picture Study Movement, which began around the turn of the twentieth century with postcard-size reproductions of works of art (Logan, 1955). We can still see vestiges of this approach in teachers' discussions of art reproductions and in the obligatory critique that follows the conclusion of a studio production lesson. Art criticism as a distinct area of study was specifically discussed in the 1960s (Mattil, 1966), but it was not until 1985 that there was a widespread concern with how such instruction could be organized (The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1985).

## Characteristics of Art Criticism Instruction

As a result of the previous inattention to art criticism, relatively little research and theory development has been done on academic options for instruction, let alone the role vernacular art criticism could have in school settings or upon the art commentary that appears on the pages of newspapers and magazines. The result of this lack of research and theory development has been that a few academic art criticism formats have been presented in the literature as correct approaches. Feldman's (1981) "critical performance" consisting of the categories of description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, and Broudy's (1972) "aesthetic scanning" consisting of the discussion categories of

sensory, formal, expressive, and technical qualities have received primary attention and instructional implementation. Aesthetic scanning, in particular, has been discussed as an art critical approach that should be an integral part of art instruction inasmuch as it is believed to be an approach that can be replicated in any setting. It is, in other words, believed to be context free. Any object can, in effect, be aesthetically scanned for the above-mentioned qualities.

While Feldman's approach can be readily adapted to an exploration of an object's sociocultural meanings and functions (Hamblen, 1986), both Feldman's and Broudy's methods have been primarily focused toward an analysis of the perceptual, ostensibly intrinsic, qualities of the art work. It is assumed that an analysis and interpretation of art's formal qualities, i.e., qualities of line, shape, color, etc., and their relationships, are universally applicable. Art criticism is given a formalistic interpretation in curriculum guidelines, scholarly research journals, and magazines for the practicing art teacher and general classroom teacher.

A survey of art criticism discussions in art and art education literature has revealed a range of academic procedures or formats for organizing talk about art (Hamblen, 1985). These formats were found to vary in the particular discussion categories delineated and in the extent to which they allow for student-initiated responses. As such, these academic modes of art criticism represent options that need to be made available to teachers so that a broader focus can be allowed in such instruction. However, even though these identified formats do

provide a broadening of focus and options beyond the current fare of Feldman's and Broudy's approaches, they still represent a limiting perspective. Most have in common a focus on intrinsic [read, formalistic] qualities of the object, and many were designed to parallel closely the steps of some human process or activity that is believed to be universally experienced. For example, a format discussed by Mittler (1976) consists of discussion categories assumed to parallel the stages of recognition and interpretation involved in visual perception. Critical thinking, artistic expression, cognitive development, and scientific investigation are some of the other behaviors that art criticism formats are believed to parallel (Hamblen, 1985).

Art criticism format selection is not just a curriculum choice predicated on certain beliefs about education. When a particular art criticism approach is linked to a universal behavior, it takes on the validity of that behavior and its assumed universal presence. There is a certain correctness or even absolutism that surrounds the art criticism enterprise, and a missionary zeal for a particular approach can easily develop.

In addition to linking the format to a major human process or activity and to a focus on what is considered intrinsic to the physical object, most formats also have the stated purpose of weaning the individual away from the language and associational meanings of his/her everyday life. As such, art criticism format selection takes on pansocial significance and is supposedly applicable to all populations

and situations. These latter characteristics are also prerequisites for aesthetic experiences as defined in this century. Art criticism, therefore, has often assumed a correctness and a universalism based on at least three linkages to properties of the object or to behaviors of humans that are assumed to be universally accessible, i.e., the aesthetic experience, formal qualities of the object, and pansocial human activities.

## Assumptions of Universalism

That perception and experience of formal qualities of art are a necessary good is found to be engrained in modern aesthetic theory and in theories of aesthetic perception. While Kant (1790/1952) realized that all people will not judge an art work similarly, nonetheless he believed that they ought to do so. Kant's optimism in a convergence of judgment was dependent on viewers' abilities to rise above the exigencies of time and place. In the 1700s, Shaftesbury introduced the artistic idea of "disinterestedness" wherein the viewer does not desire the object in a physical or possessive sense, and Schopenhauer, in the following century, shifted the emphasis from the art object to the contemplative state in which the qualities of the object are experienced (Dickie, 1971; Osborne, 1970, 1972). It was, however, Kant in his 1790 publication of Critique of Judgement, who formulated a theory of aesthetic response, interpretation, and judgment that serves as the cornerstone of modern aesthetic theory and of formalism. According to Kant, all people would judge art in a similar manner if they would experience the art object in-and-of-itself, isolated from all personal,

associational, extrinsic purposes. To accomplish this, the object must be viewed free of interest, and even without an interest in the very existence of the object. Form is essentially an internal-mental construct of the experience; it is within the experience of the viewer. However, the aesthetic judgment is neither personal nor relative. This supra-state of sensory awareness is accomplished by the object being experienced as a thing-in-and-of-itself, isolated from utility; the viewer is required to rise above the exigencies of time, place, and personal idiosyncrasies. Therefore, when a judgment is made, the viewer, in Kant's infamous phrase, "judges not merely for himself, but for all men" (p. 52).

In 1913 Bullough (1913/1935) introduced the idea of psychic distancing which is instigated by "putting the phenomenon . . . out of gear with our practical, actual self . . . by looking at it 'objectively'" (p. 317). The experience may personally engage the viewer, but it is not a particularized personal experience. While a strict formalist such as Clive Bell (1913/1958) would abide no contamination of the pure perceptual response to form, other aestheticians would admit within the aesthetic brackets what is considered part of the art context, such as relationships to other art works and the biography of the artist (Dickie 1971; Kaelin 1972; Rosenberg, 1966). By linking art criticism to the twentieth century character of aesthetic experiencing, this has meant that statements about an object must be referential to the object itself. Some art

educators suggest that when students engage in art criticism, they must remain focused on what can be grounded in the object itself (Feinstein, 1983). This emanates from the modern idea that "A work of art . . . does not point beyond itself to something else" (Langer 1971, p. 91).

Philosophically, and even anthropologically, the aesthetic experience requires a bracketing out of personal and cultural baggage. How the bracketed experience comes to have any meaning in a mental state of tabula rasa is, however, a matter of psychological theorizing. In the aesthetically isolated state, the viewer has no choice but to judge on the basis of a universal apprehension since only universal cognitive structures are operative. In a judgment of beauty, universal individualism is operative, and there is a so-called fit between artistic form and cognitive structure. The form is judged as beautiful or pleasant when it is congruent with such mental structures, and the aesthetic is subjective only in the sense that it is internally experienced. In such cases, the art response would seem to be free from tradition or, for that matter, from special learning or privilege. It would appear that a democratic condition of equal access to aesthetic qualities would be operative. This, however, assumes that bracketing itself is a natural process, perhaps attained through maturity. The lack of recognizable subject matter, such as in much modern fine art, would even seem to facilitate bracketing, i.e., providing the means of reaching a universal state. However, the confusion modern abstract art has engendered among the general population would suggest that aesthetic qualities, as defined in modern aesthetic theory, are far from being

equally accessible or merely a matter of attaining some sort of aesthetic maturity.

The analogy of a painting to a window with a view of a garden is often used to illustrate the difference between what is intrinsic and extrinsic to art as well as how art is to be viewed in the twentieth century compared to past viewing expectations. Prior to this century, the viewer would look through the window (painting) to the garden beyond, recognizing types of vegetation, cloud formations, people in the garden, and so on. Utilitarian functions, personal associations, and cultural values from one's life and memories were allowed in the view into the garden. In contrast, in the twentieth century the viewer is to eschew all personal and cultural associations and look only at the flat surface of the window pane itself on which are seen the garden's abstracted colors, textures, and shapes. According to Clive Bell (1913/1958),

> The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful, but it is always irrelevant. For to appreciate a work of art, we must bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its affairs and ideas, no familiarity with its emotions. (p. 27)

According to formalist theory, artists, albeit subconsciously, in all times and places have been concerned with arrangements of the formal elements of design. This is what is believed to be intrinsic to art throughout time and space irrespective of style, function, or cultural

meaning.

> One should remember that a painting--before being a warhorse, a nude woman or some anecdote--is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order. (Maurice Denis, Theories 1890-1910. Paris. 1912. p. 1. quoted by Jaffe, 1965, p. 139)

When the viewer of art is bracketed from the personal and the cultural, there is a free play of cognitive powers, and such free play is the same for all minds. The physical aspects of art are an analogue of mental and perceptual structuring. In this sense, Gestalt principles of visual organization afforded aestheticians a rational explanation of judgments of pleasure, beauty, order, and general fitness of form (Segy, 1967).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the tremendous influence the formalist aesthetic has had on art production, response, and interpretation, e.g., the proliferation of abstract and nonobjective art, the subject of art being the material means of art, the creation of art-for-art's sake, the artist's artist, and so on. There is, of course, also the influence art critics have had on artists' creation of art, and the prescriptive and defining function art criticism has played.

Kandinsky (1912/1947) believed that the causes of democracy would be served by abstract or nonobjective art in that no prior knowledge would be required for understanding or appreciation. Modern abstract art may have in part arisen as a reaction against the literary excesses of Academy art which often required a classical education for

interpretation and appreciation. Kandinsky thought that abstract art could foster a universal, spiritual awakening. The democratic ideals of abstraction were, however, circumvented by their own cultural embeddedness. The more abstract art became, the more it became dependent on art critical explanations, to the point where even the explanations themselves required explanation (T. Wolfe, 1975).

Art in the past centuries has gone though a series of separations and specializations, i.e., the separation of craft from art, of artisan from artist, and the spiritual object from the secular. Fine art became defined as that which rises above the exigencies of ordinary life and, through aesthetic bracketing, supposedly can be experienced irrespective of one's personal, social, and educational background.

It is not serendipitous that the abstract formulations of Kandinsky and the Russian constructivists; the Gestalt psychology of Koehler, Koffka, and Wertheimer; and modern aesthetic theory as delineated in the formalism of Fry and Bell coincided in the early part of this century (Bloomer & Moore, 1977; Segy, 1967). Abstraction, Gestalt principles of perception, and formalism gave credence to a pan-aestheticism that informed the methods of study and analysis in art theory, art instruction, art history, and art criticism during much of the twentieth century. The power of formalism is that it seems to be applicable to all types of art and all types of people.

In the visual arts, I believe certain formal categories are universally attended to. These include, at the very least,

> symmetry, proportion and balance, surface finish, and where pertinent, structural soundness. Cultures may differ widely in terms of what exactly is valued in these categories, but the categories themselves are attended to by artist and audience alike. Each culture recognizes canons in these areas, and their violation stems from either lack of skill or deliberate intent to jar the average viewer. (Silver, 1979, pp. 290-291)

Waddington (1969), however, believed that a perceptual response to pure sensate data requires more sophistication than does functional perception. Moreover, the visual immediacy of the aesthetic experience has been found to be highly dependent upon cultural expectations that such and such objects might afford aesthetic contemplation, based on learned perceptual conventions (Q. Bell, 1974; Gombrich, 1969).

With art criticism associated with aesthetic experience, with it focused toward the analysis of formal qualities within the self-contained world of art, and with an eschewing of all personal and cultural associations as a requirement, it is not surprising that academic art criticism requires instruction and a fair amount of practice. Recent studies of the developmental character of verbal responses to art suggest that the ability to deal with the intrinsic qualities of art is not merely a matter of maturation (D. Wolfe, 1988). An ability to "overcome" personal preferences and associational interpretations in order to deal with art formalistically is highly dependent on educational training. This suggests that the perception of

abstract elements of design are a particular, culturally based outcome that may have little to do with a universal way of perceiving and evaluating and more to do with cultural values and training. Even Kant knew that all people would not judge in a similar manner. He, however, attributed differences in judgment to sensibility, not to cultural values.

## Valuation, Selection, and Emphasis

Specific academic art criticism formats are often discussed as having universal application due to their similarities to constructs explanatory of valued human activities, to their focus on the art object per se, to the minimizing of subjective responses, and to their association with the aesthetic experience. These similarities need to be understood as being culturally biased, and biased in support of the values of particular segments of society. They have little relationship to how talk about art naturally occurs, and have obscured the rich options for art criticism that could exist. At this time, art criticism, as evidenced in art education, is characterized by very little research on alternative methods, and, as a result, a few formalistic approaches predominate. Not surprisingly, even less research has been done on vernacular art criticism--either to study it in its natural settings or to bring it into educational settings (Congdon, 1986).

According to Weitz (1962), there is no one, all-inclusive theory that can explain art in its many manifestations. Rather, any given

theory of art tends to highlight some aspects of art while it obscures others. The formulation or the selection of a theory is contingent upon human meaning and intent. In other words, it is not just the art object per se that gives us information about social and aesthetic meaning, but also the entire configuration of functions, meanings, and evaluations that serve to define the art object. The ascendancy of particular theories of art can be related to social values and aesthetic priorities at given times and places (Hamblen & Jones, 1982). In much the same way, the particular forms that art criticism assumes represent selected, humanly authored traditions of talk about art that are predicated on personal and social value orientations. The fact that developmental stages of aesthetic response do not naturally, as a matter of maturation, result in the designed end goals of nonsubjective, formalistic interpretations suggests that a selection process of social evaluation is operative in the use of formalistic art criticism.

Formalist theory, as applied to art criticism, is just one approach. There are other art theories that have application to art criticism, e.g., imitationalist theories of art, expressive theories, instrumental theories, and so on (Abrams, 1953). Any one of these theories or variations within them can be selected as an approach that might be given social validation and, eventually, educational implementation. For example, the end goal of art criticism could be that of understanding and evaluating art on the basis of social utility as, perhaps, some variation on Marxist, instrumental aesthetics. Within a given community, such talk about art would be focused toward this goal

with the result that one might ascertain stages of development for social-aesthetic understanding. In other words, developmental patterns, and certainly their endpoints, are culturally variable. There may well be developmental patterns for imitationalist, formalist, expressive, and instrumental theories of art, and for art criticism. These four theories, although not exclusive of other theoretical possibilities, focus on aspects which all art objects possess to some extent, and to that extent these aspects are universal. It is, however, in a cultural context that particular aspects are given social, artworld validity and become the way in which art talk is framed and becomes taken-for-granted. In a given sociocultural context, art talk may take on a correctness that, from an ethnocentric perspective, has an assumed universalism. When researchers begin to listen to vernacular art criticism, it becomes apparent that there are many naturalistically occurring approaches to art criticism. Likewise, specific art criticism approaches, much like art theories, can be consciously selected to highlight particular aspects, meanings, and functions of art. There is a need to bring to consciousness that both vernacular and academic art criticism are part of systems of choice and selection that shape aesthetic reality.

We are continually finding that many of the developmental structures that we assumed were universally applicable have actually been formulated from highly culturally biased phenomena and data. While there may be a certain cross-cultural similarity among various

developmental stages in early childhood, levels of development at adolescence, or when children enter the socializing world of formal schooling, often veer in a variety of directions due to personality differences, socioeconomic background, gender, religious affiliations, and so on. For example, Gilligan (1982) found that females in Western cultures tend to have different moral and cognitive developmental patterns than those outlined by Kohlberg and Piaget. The tragedy, of course, is that only certain developmental patterns and their end points may be given legitimacy in a given culture, with the result that alternatives are ignored or are labelled as deviant, retarded, or, just plainly wrong.

## The Distribution of Aesthetic Discourse

At this crucial juncture in the history of art criticism and its possible widespread instructional implementation, it is essential that the differential distribution of aesthetic discourse be examined. Both the social assumptions underlying talk about art and how access is limited to legitimated types of talk can be easily obscured inasmuch as the formalistic, self-referent, and art-specific nature of much art criticism parallels many of the characteristics of western modernity. Formalist art criticism <u>seems</u> correct in the academic world. It has acquired a taken-for-granted "fit" to much fine art partly because it has a compatibility with the characteristics of knowledge, in general, that are socially legitimated. And, of course, it possesses many similarities with how other subject areas are taught in our nation's schools. As such, formalistic art criticism partakes of larger societal

legitimations regarding abstract knowledge, a reliance on expert pronouncements of meaning, a decontextualization of experience, self-referent specialization, a hierarchy of legitimated knowledge and professions, and so on.

In past centuries, power and capital resided in the possession of tangible goods (Gouldner, 1979). In the twentieth century of information societies, capital has increasingly been concentrated in particular types of knowledge and the ability to manipulate abstract language systems. The cash culture and its cash languages are characterized by self-referent codes of meaning that are acquired through highly specialized education that is exclusionary, if not totally inaccessible, to those who are not or cannot be part of this culture. Membership in the cash culture allows access not only to monetary advantages, but also access to the very way this dominant culture is managed, distributed, and defined. Gouldner (1979) has called this new class of knowledge brokers the culture of critical discourse (CCD). It is manifested in the official, fine art world as the culture of aesthetic discourse (CAD) (Hamblen, 1984). In the culture of aesthetic discourse, what is known <u>about</u> art is a form of capital that can be bartered for incomes, prestige, and access to social groups wherein talk about art is a prerequisite. The CAD is characterized by formalistic, self-referent talk about art requiring highly specialized and particularized knowledge about primarily western fine art forms. The CAD has among its assumptions the view that art is

a specialized area of study engaged in by individuals knowledgeable about fine art traditions, that there are recognized artistic exemplars, that art is ultimately about art, and that expert judgments should prevail.

Art criticism instruction that would introduce students to these assumptions and to the culture of aesthetic discourse would, supposedly, be democratic in its intent to allow students to become part of the aesthetic cash culture--as well as experience the very best the artworld has to offer--assuming that there is primarily one legitimated artworld, and that there is a consensus on this matter. This is the rationale used by those who call for art education as an institution that acts as an open elite organization (Smith, 1987). The conundrum presented by open elite education and, more specifically, by the ostensible democracy of the CAD is that the human authorship and the selectivity of this tradition is obscured, and it denigrates, by omission, other traditions--in much the same way that a democratic farce is perpetuated by dictators who allow for free elections with only one candidate listed on the ballot. Access to just one artistic tradition that is presented as inevitable, ahistorical, and "the best" usurps the educational goals of choice and participation and broad human and aesthetic understandings.

The culture of aesthetic discourse is alien to the everyday experience of art. It is "impersonal, theoretical, and autonomous" (Hamblen, 1984, p. 31). The CAD is integral to the artworld of the gallery dealer, museum director, historian, and academic. The democratic paradox is that while art is often considered inaccessible

to those without such language skills, accessibility imposes a class structure. "The New Class silently inaugurates a new hierarchy of the knowing, the knowledgeable, the reflexive and insightful. Those who talk well, it is held, excel over those who talk poorly or not at all" (Gouldner, 1979, p. 85). "Aesthetic knowledge is democratized at the expense of a loss of warmth, imagination, and spontaneity of subcultural art experiences" (Hamblen, 1984, p. 31). When singular perspectives on art are considered correct, albeit based on an open elite, entry into the CAD "distances persons from local cultures, so that they feel an alienation from all particularistic, history-bound places and from ordinary, everyday life" (Gouldner, 1979, p. 59).

Linkages to aesthetic experience, to pansocial human activities, and to the physical integrity of the art object tend to obscure formalistic art criticism's origins and the fact that any one art criticism approach represents a particular choice among many possibilities. An attempt needs to be made to give equal representation and access to as many aesthetic viewpoints as are feasible. This does not mean that current art criticism formats are not valuable. Formalist approaches can provide a valuable tool for analysis. In particular, formal analysis can be a highly valuable approach for dealing with abstract art and with exotic art. Formal analysis, however, should not be an end goal in and of itself nor should this type of art criticism--nor any other type--take on an exclusionary correctness that excludes other modes of talking about art. Formal analysis of modern fine art, for example, has

resulted in an almost complete ignoring of how this art is very much about modern society and that abstract art of all types has content and meaning beyond its formal relationships (Hamblen, 1983).

The democratic fallacy of an open elite is that equal access means access to a singular, preselected view of reality. It is exclusionary and is based on a reliance on experts' opinions, which have developed within the self-contained assumptions that have given legitimacy to the open elite institutions themselves. This incestuous relationship of self-referent legitimation of aesthetic knowledge needs to be examined if aesthetic democracy is to prevail and if the chosenness of current approaches is to be revealed. Rather than supporting a range of ways of understanding and appreciating art, certain artworlds are being given legitimacy, and art criticism knowledge is distributed along social class lines. The official world of art, as defined by the culture elite, is part of the larger knowledge industry on which our information society depends.

## Prescriptions for the Future

Since art criticism is not yet entrenched as an instructional practice with engrained expectations, it is possible that at this nascent stage the opportunity exists to begin such instruction with an inclusive base. I am suggesting that future planning for art criticism instruction attend to three aspects. First, a variety of academic art criticism formats needs to be developed and instructionally implemented according to the needs, abilities, and interests of teachers and students. At this point, very little research has been done as to how

individual differences influence what can be learned in regard to art criticism. Studio instruction has a long history of sensitivity to how students relate to particular types of studio activities and content--on the basis of age, gender, socioeconomic background, development level, cultural values, aesthetic experiences, and cognitive style. The role individual differences play in art criticism instruction should stimulate the use of different types of approaches. Also, art criticism formats should be developed that allow for the exploration of different meanings of art as well as be directed toward a variety of art forms, i.e., fine art, popular arts, folk art, commercial art. Increasing the sophistication and elaboration of imitationalist, formalist, expressive, and instrumental meanings would be possible through the use of variable academic art criticism formats.

Second, vernacular, naturally occurring art criticism needs to be allowed expression within the classroom setting. Also, vernacular art criticism needs to be studied in its natural settings as valid ways of understanding and appreciating art. Just as a variety of artistic types should be created and studied, so also a range of types of art criticism should be engaged in and studied. Undoubtedly, a study of vernacular art criticism would generate new ways of considering art criticism and the formulation of new academic approaches.

Third, the act of art criticism itself, its origins and the use of particular types, needs to be examined for its taken-for-granted assumptions and for its ability to illuminate some aspects of art and to

obscure others. Talk about art represents socially and personally embedded choices; talk about art can also be a way to examine the basis for those choices. I have elsewhere proposed that students, for example, not only need to know how to read and study their textbooks; they also need the ability to examine the choices made by the authors of their texts (Hamblen, 1988). Likewise, for art criticism instruction, students should be given the opportunity to ask what has been included, what has been excluded and why, what is the result of such inclusions and exclusions, who has made such choices, who benefits, and who does not benefit. A curriculum choice is a sociopolitical decision inasmuch as it allows for some views of reality and it disallows for others. Art criticism, no less than other aspects of art instruction, presents occasions for elaborated artistic understandings as well as a critical consciousness of the origins, range, and possible consequences of instructional choices.

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